

# ROBERT INDIANA "LOVE" SCULPTOR

b. September 13, 1928

d. May 19, 2018

*"I am an American painter of signs  
charting the course."*

**His bold sculptural  
rendering of the word  
"LOVE" is displayed in  
more than 50 public  
locations worldwide.**

A pioneering American artist, Robert Indiana was instrumental in the evolution of Assemblage and Pop Art. He is best known for his ubiquitous 1965 work "LOVE," which features the word rendered in colorful stacked letters with the "O" tilted.

Born Robert Clark, he was raised in Indiana during the Great Depression. His adoptive father worked for the Phillips 66 energy company, and as a child, Indiana often looked up at company's boldly lettered sky-high logo. It made an indelible impact on his creative sensibility.

Indiana spent time in the Air Force before studying at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1954 he moved to New York to begin his artistic career. "I was told ... if I should

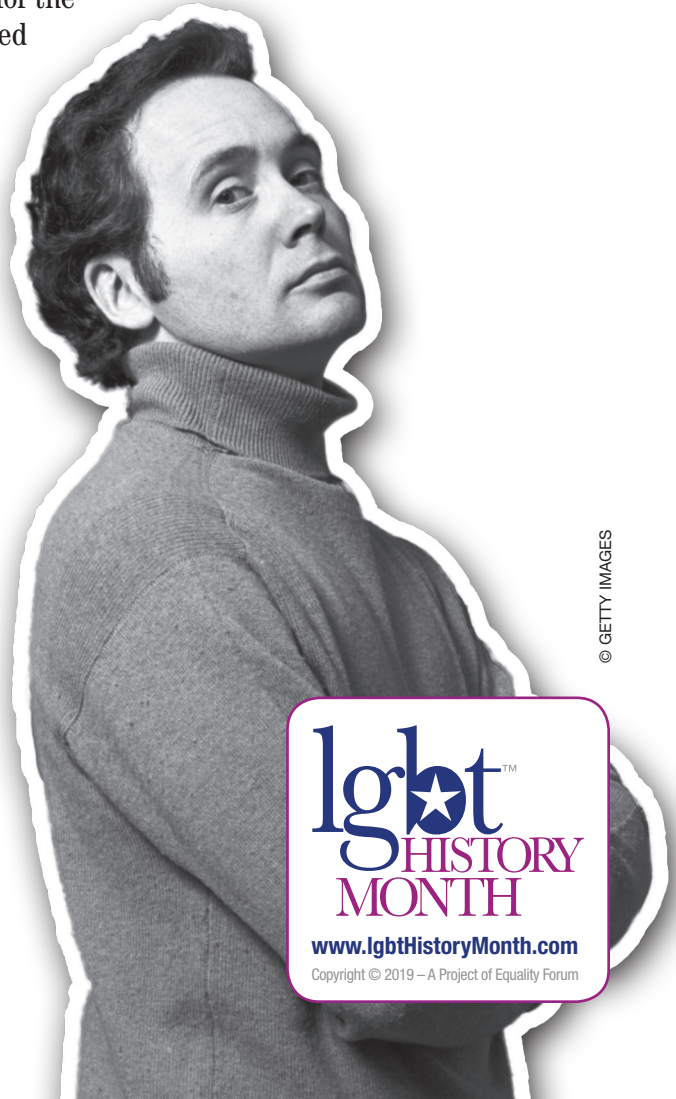
persist in this ambition I'd be eating bean soup and living in a garret," he recalled. "And that's exactly what happened."

Indiana's fortunes turned when he met his lover, Ellsworth Kelly, a fellow artist living in the waterfront neighborhood of Coenties Slip, a lower Manhattan haven for contemporary painters and sculptors. Kelly helped Indiana find housing there and introduced him to other trailblazing gay artists: Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Agnes Martin. Together, they laid the groundwork for the Pop and Minimalist Art of the 1960s. During this time, Indiana adopted his new surname as an homage to his roots and the distinctively American subject matter he chose to explore.

Inspired by the maritime trade at Coenties Slip, Indiana repurposed planks and used stencils of short, bold words to make enigmatic "sign" assemblages. The darker aspects of the American ethos became a central theme in his work, including "The American Dream #1," an oil painting featuring words such as "tilt" and "take all."

In 1965 the Museum of Modern Art commissioned Indiana to create a Christmas card. The result marked a watershed in his career. Inspired by the inscription "God is Love" from the churches of his youth, his late father and the colors of the Phillips 66 sign, he produced "LOVE." He reimagined the work in painting and sculpture, and in the 1970s it appeared on a U.S. postage stamp. "LOVE" has been translated into multiple languages. Today, more than 50 versions are displayed in public locations worldwide, including Philadelphia's famous LOVE Park.

Indiana eventually complained that the widespread popularity and appropriation of his work caused the art world to shun him. He retreated to a remote island in Maine in 1978, where he continued his art until he died at age 89.



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